



SENATOR

**KEN JACOBSEN**

46th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



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# Washington State Parks: A Foggy Future?





# Or a Bright Tomorrow?







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## Washington State Senate

**Senator Ken Jacobsen**  
46th Legislative District  
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Dear Friends:

Much has been said and written in recent weeks about the possible closure of some of Washington's most treasured assets — our state parks. My first message to you is this: Don't panic. But like you, I am quite concerned about the future of our state's natural resources, wildlife and recreational opportunities.

Puget Sound has always been one of the best places in the country to hike, fish, and enjoy the great outdoors. With 125 state parks, it's a place where families can have fun together, be it a short day hike, bird-watching, or a canoe trip.

But what is now one of the nation's greatest outdoor playgrounds may soon have too many outdoor enthusiasts to handle. By the year 2010, a million more people will be living in the Puget Sound region, placing tremendous pressure on our existing parks and communities. In short, we're going to need more parks, not fewer, as public demand for more nearby outdoor recreational areas continues to increase.

That's why, during the 1998 legislative session, I proposed creating the Cascade Foothills State Park from state-owned lands, putting the priority on recreation rather than logging. A review of existing public and private outdoor recreation facilities within the Cascade foothills would give us a better picture of how they are — or aren't — meeting public outdoor recreation demand. I hope to reintroduce the bill in 1999.

But in terms of any and all future legislation, we must face financial facts: Because of global economic uncertainty, an unexpected local economic slowdown, citizen-imposed state spending limits, and voter passage of Referendum 49, **all** state programs could face cuts in the next two years. That includes parks.

Richard Thompson, director of the governor's Office of Financial Management, has explained even more fully why park closures are even being considered. As he says, Governor Locke has asked **all** state agencies to prepare budget requests built around a 7 percent spending reduction. That way, the Governor — and lawmakers — can see clearly what's at stake **if** cuts become necessary.

One thing I do know: Our parks, for too long, have been on the short end of the funding stick. For 18 years, our park system has had to cope with declining budgets. Even though park use is up, park services and maintenance have been severely curtailed.

That's why we need your input when we meet for the legislative session in January. The toll-free Legislative Hotline is **1-800-562-6000**. I encourage you to continue your active interest in the state's budget process and invite you to make your voice heard.

These issues are just too important to our state and to our quality of life. So don't hesitate to call or write Governor Locke and my colleagues and express your opinions.

Sincerely,

Ken Jacobsen

**Committees:** Natural Resources, Parks & Recreation, Chair • Higher Education  
Environmental Quality & Water Resources • Transportation

# Our Parks' Future: In Our Hands

## The Situation

In anticipation of the I-601 spending limit and the possible loss of general fund money because of passage of Referendum 49, Governor Locke has asked all departments to propose 7 percent cuts in their 1999-2001 budget proposals. The state park system already anticipates a \$2 million shortfall in its current budget.

Combined, the shortfall and the reduced budget request amount to a need for \$5 million in cuts.

To absorb that reduction, 42 parks may face closure.

## The Past

In 20 years, park visits have increased 50 percent, but parks budget cuts in the last 18 years have eliminated or curtailed:

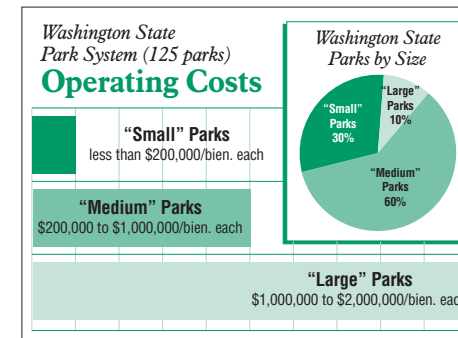
- Lifeguards in parks
- Youth work programs
- Campfire programs
- Visitor center personnel
- Informational publications

In addition, 40 parks are closed to visitors in the off season, needed maintenance has been deferred, and many rangers must work alone.

## Current Use and State Funding

- Currently, there are 51 million park visits each year.
- A 1994 Washington State Parks Commission study showed that Washington states parks contributed \$860 million annually to the state's economy, resulting in 11,400 payroll jobs (not including state employees).
- Washington ranks 48th in park funding (per visitor), spending only 63 cents per park visitor. The national average is \$1.82.

- Revenue varies from park to park. For example, Fort Worden Park and Conference Center generates about 80 percent of its total budget, while many day-use parks generate no revenue. Camping parks are in between. Overall, our park system budget is 35 percent revenue.



## The Closures

In developing its proposed park closure list, a blue-ribbon citizens panel considered:

- The number of visitors to each park
- The activities offered at each park
- The operating costs of each park
- The amount of money each park generates
- The impact on local community a park's closure would have
- The cultural, historic and geographic significance of each park



Photos courtesy Washington State Parks

## Town Hall Meeting

Senator Ken Jacobsen invites you to a 46th District Town Hall Meeting to discuss Health Care.

**Wednesday, January 6,  
7:00-8:30 p.m.**

**National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration  
Building**

**Auditorium, Building 9**

**7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle**

(The smaller building in front of  
the flag pole.)

Representatives Phyllis Kenney and  
Jim McIntire will also be in attendance

(Parking is available on site at no  
charge for this special event.)

If you have questions or comments on  
the upcoming legislative session, call:

**Sen. Ken Jacobsen:**

(360) 786-7690 *Olympia Office*  
(206) 368-4489 *District Office*

**Legislative Hotline:**

1-800-562-6000

*\*\*Note: Due to mailing deadlines and restrictions, the 46th District delegation was unable to do a joint newsletter this year. We will continue with our joint mailing in the spring of '99.*